

LIMERICK SOCIALIST

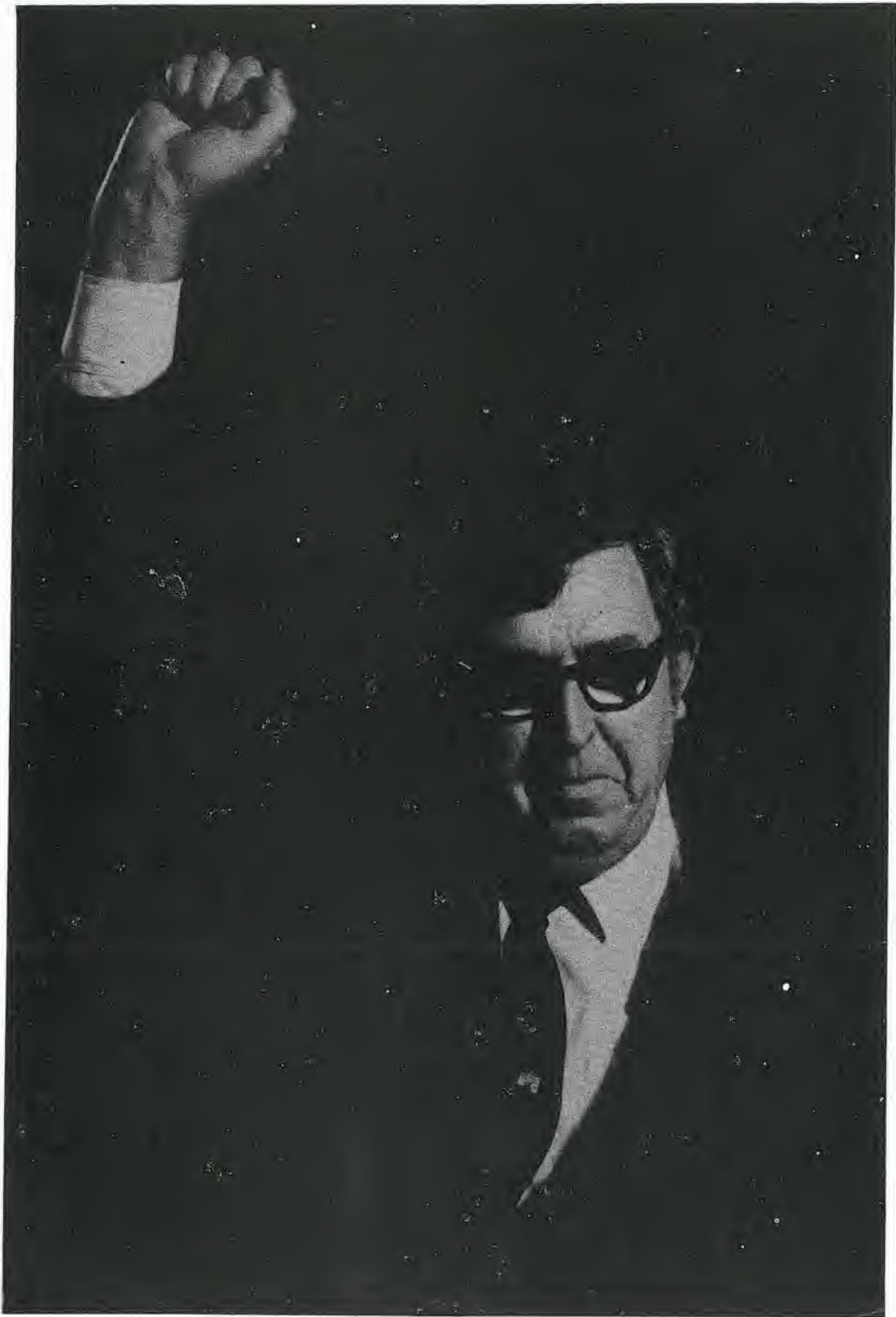
JUNE 1981

15p.

VOL. 10 NO. 6

THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . . James Connolly



Humanitarian Hogwash!

What can you do for the hunger-strikers? There are many things you can do to show your humanitarian concern. Smash a window - burn a bus - stone a milkman - on humanitarian grounds. Or if your abilities exceed those of the common rioter, you could shoot a British soldier, a census-collector or any of the numerous types who may legitimately - on humanitarian grounds - be shot.

The H-Block campaign is about **increasing** human suffering, not about diminishing it. By any one's reckoning, there is a lot of blood between here and an all-Ireland Republic. Only as a step on that road has the conflict in H-Block any meaning. The people who are orchestrating the H-Block campaign, the Provisional IRA, are quite clear about that. But they need the support of people who do not want intensive civil strife, as well as of those who do. So they are playing on the emotions, trying every deceitful trick to arouse the nationalist mob psychology which they require.

Cardinal O'Fiaich, Charles Haughey and John Hume are helping them. All three seem to be agreed that if the prisoners could wear their own clothes at all times and did not have to do prison work, the H-Block protest would end. But if that was the case, the first hunger-strike, let alone the second, could never have begun, unless the prisoners were mentally deranged.

A prisoner in the Maze who conforms is entitled to wear his own clothes for much of the time if it is accepted that military uniforms are out, and civilian-type clothing supplied by the state during the remaining periods. In that model which is so often held up for admiration, Portlaoise, the prisoners wear their own clothes all the time, but they are not allowed to possess anything which could possibly make up a military uniform. So, the conforming prisoner in the Maze cannot wear a military un-

iform, but he does not have to wear a prison uniform either. And all he need do to avoid prison work is to enroll on an educational course.

Since this was the position before the last hunger-strike began, if Sands died to end the indignities of prison uniform and prison work, he must have been mentally deranged. O'Fiaich, Haughey and Hume wouldn't be the full shilling either, if they believe what they are saying.

The truth is the H-Block has become a focus in the conflict of political will about Northern Ireland's destiny. Therefore, no compromise is possible. All that is possible is political victory for one side and political defeat for the other. Bobby Sands died to win a political vantage point for the IRA. No other interpretation makes sense.

The people of the Republic are largely indifferent to what happens in H-Block. They see no reason why they should get deeply involved. They don't see how nationalist mob oratory, marching, rioting and bombing can contribute to their well-being - not surprisingly, since it can't. That such a publicity-bathed and traditionally emotive event as the death on hunger-strike of a Republican MP could draw only 3,000 marchers onto the streets of Dublin for a funeral march, while 5 times that number demonstrated against unemployment on May Day just a week before would have seemed unbelievable a few years ago. Not any more ... Production and distribution, work and the class struggle now engross the attention of southern workers. A section of Northern Catholics are rushing down a blind alley - alone. For all the sympathy of Haughey, Blaney and Sile de Valera with their aims, if the South cannot be aroused, the H-Block campaigners have failed.

FIANNA FAIL'S ELECTION GAMBLE

The Purpose and Function Of Fianna Fail's Republicanism

Fianna Fail was historically the party of the Irish petty bourgeoisie - the small farmers and capitalists and the self employed. They championed "the small man" against big business (particularly foreign big business). They identified with "the common people", the not-so-well-off and the underprivileged as opposed to the professional elites which dominated Cumann na nGael.

But small businessmen under Fianna Fail did what small businessmen always do - they became bigger farmers, or else they or their children emigrated or came to Dublin to look for work. A new class of industrialists and nouveau riche developed under economic protectionism, and in these new industries, the small but slow expanding working class saw industrial growth which they came to identify with Fianna Fail. Fianna Fail still maintains most of this traditional support; the small and not so small farmers and businessmen, the gombeenmen who grew rich under their rule and who now subscribe so generously to party funds. And, alas, the bulk of the working class.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

How does Fianna Fail reconcile all these varied interests? How can it appear to champion differing sectional interests - to be the "party of enterprise" both urban and rural, as well as of

the working class? By populist rhetoric, they still play the "common people" tune. They survive and thrive by containing and balancing the interest of all these diverse "common people", making concessions to each in turn as it becomes necessary. Fianna Fail **will** respond to popular pressure for reform, but it **will not develop** policies for the working class; it concedes only what it needs to ensure the maximum control of the working class for the minimum of progressive development.

Above all, Fianna Fail needs nationalist mythology to give itself and its supporters a sense of direction which will override and swamp their differing economic interests. Class interests are subsumed into the greater national goal - the onward march of the nation to Irish unity and destiny.

AFTER UNITY - EL DORADO

"Destiny", of course, cannot come until **after** unity. Haughey has explicitly stated that Ireland faces a great future only after it is united. There is however, no logical reason to believe we would be any better off in an all-Ireland Republic, and economic commentators see no particular benefits in a united Ireland. For the southern political establishment, it is entirely a **political**, not an economic necessity to promote Irish unity. Whether it is achieved or not does not particularly matter - it keeps people's eyes fixed on pie in the sky. The **myth** of Irish unity is more important than its realisation.

If sections of the working class translate social discontent

THE TRIUMPH OF TRYING KEMMY WINS DAIL SEAT

The general election victory of Jim Kemmy is a victory for political progress. The breakthrough is significant in national as well as local terms. Limerick and Irish politics will never be the same again.

The success of Jim Kemmy was no flash in the pan. It was achieved by persistence and hard work - and, above all, by his determined adherence to socialist principles.

The achievement is all the more satisfying when one considers that it was gained outside the cocoon of nationalist politics. For once a socialist candidate went forward for election without even the smallest concession to the reactionary forces of nationalism.

The people of Limerick responded well to the opportunity for political progress. In electing Jim Kemmy to the fourth seat in the five-seat constituency the Limerick people gave the lie to the oft-quoted belief that the city is a bastion of obscurantism and backwardness.

Twelve candidates contested the Limerick East constituency, and the election was one of the most hard fought in the country. All shades of Irish political opinion were represented.

In the event Jim Kemmy secured a comprehensive victory over the two Labour Party candidates, Frank Pendergast and Mick Lipper.

With this breakthrough, Kemmy has moved into the indisputed leadership in the Limerick working class movement.

There is a lesson to be learned by all Irish socialists from Jim Kemmy's victory. The success has heralded a new era of opportunity for Irish socialism. Limerick has shown the way forward.

into radical republicanism, that suits southern politicians well enough. Even if radical republicanism seems at times hostile to the Irish government, it is Britain which is the ultimate villain, because the northern issue is not one over which the Irish Government has any jurisdiction. Demands to put pressure on Britain, or to do "something for our people up there" can be contained and used, but it is much less pleasant for southern politicians when popular pressure builds up on matters over which they **do** have jurisdiction.

Haughey is not responding to popular pressure when he plays the Republican card. He is trying to rouse a population more interested in PAYE than partition. For most southerners, the goal of Irish unity is untranslatable into reality without a level of disturbance to southern development which is unacceptable. The two previous governments who tried to make the north an election issue lost their gamble. It remains to be seen if the particularly tense situation in the north will arouse people enough to make Haughey's green card pay off.

H-Block and sectarian civil war

H-BLOCK: WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

There is more to the H-Block issue than meets the eye. It is only one pitched battle in a long and bloody campaign. But it is a very important pitched battle. The result of this battle will probably determine whether or not Northern Ireland slides into a sectarian civil war.

If the H-Block campaign can break the British Government's will to treat IRA prisoners in the same manner as it treats all other prisoners, then the IRA will have good reason to hope that it can also prevail on the larger point of principle: the British Government's commitment to govern Northern Ireland. That is what it's all about. H-Block is a pawn on the political chessboard; a very important, very strategically-placed pawn, but nevertheless, only a pawn.

A considerable part of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland has fallen in behind the H-Block campaign. On the other side, a considerable part of the Protestant community has fallen in behind Paisley. How much further can this trend in political development go before the sectarian killings (of UDR men, RUC men, etc.) by the IRA produce a clash on the Protestant side, and violent conflict between the two communities enters an upward spiral?

If the IRA wins the conflict of wills in H-Block, that will be a sign to both communities that the British Government does not have any firm will to govern Northern Ireland. On the political side, the contest between Paisley and the Official Unionists will end right there - everything Paisley has been saying in his "Carson Trail" rallies will be vindicated. Support for extremist politicians on the Catholic side will also multiply, and the SDLP, which is green enough already, will become several shades greener. On the military side, a resurgence of the UDA and other Protestant paramilitary organisations may be expected, and the Provisional IRA will gain increased membership and Catholic support. The two communities, with the British government obviously incapable any more of restraining their conflict, will have nowhere to go except at each other's throats.

People who would find all this very gratifying, who can believe that it will lead to a new and better Ireland have good reason to support the H-Block campaign. But people who do not think that Catholic-Protestant polarisation and violence is to be welcomed have no reason to lend it their support.

THE SOUTHERN RESPONSE

So far, the popular response in the Republic to the H-Block campaign has been minimal. We believe that this is because people in the South, at a distance from the hysteria, can see what is behind it all, who is guiding the campaign, and for what purpose. In the Northern Catholic working-class areas, where emotional blackmail and physical intimidation is used by the IRA and the INLA against any individual who steps out of line, it is not easy to stand up against the mob and express opposition to the sectarian stampede. Down here, the paramilitary organisations, much to their chagrin, are not strong enough to get away with petrol-bombing people's houses, tying their children to lamp-posts or threatening them with death if they dissent. The people of the Republic can choose whether or not to support the H-Block campaign, and as far as active involvement is concerned, they have chosen overwhelmingly to ignore it.

THE RESPONSE OF SOUTHERN POLITICIANS: A HUMANITARIAN ISSUE?

After the death of Bobby Sands, Mr. Haughey issued a statement claiming that he had consistently sought a humanitarian solution" to the H-Block crisis. His statement concluded

civil war

deeply regret that such a solution could not have been found through a more flexible administration of the (Maze) prison".

Mr. Haughey has consistently taken this position since the hunger strikes began late last year. He says a "humanitarian solution" is possible, and hopes that the European Commission of Human Rights (which has already officially rejected the IRA's fundamental demand - the demand for political status) could bring such a solution about. The IRA reply that this is a diversion, and they are perfectly right. But it's a diversion that allows Haughey to have his cake and eat it; to make his own contribution to the H-Block campaign without staining his official respectability.

A humanitarian solution is not possible to the H-Block conflict. A political solution is possible. If the IRA backed down, that would end the conflict in H-Block. If the British Government backed down, that also would end the conflict in H-Block (and start, or at least, greatly augment the conflict outside H-Block). But the issues are too well defined, the point of principle is too sharp, for an honourable compromise to be possible. One side must win and the other side must lose.

PRISON REFORM?

If Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, McCreesh and O'Hara had sacrificed their lives for concrete measures of prison reform - the right to wear their own clothes and not to do prison work, for example - what has just been said would not be true. An honourable compromise would obviously be possible - and the clarifications issued last December by the Northern Ireland Office on what was available to conforming prisoners in the Maze would have been accepted finally as the basis for peaceful co-existence. The seven hunger strikers of the time, confused no doubt by the ideology of the campaign that had been built around them, did in fact accept this. If prison reform was the issue, the conflict would have gone no further. The second hunger-strike would never have begun. (Though to be realistic, if prison reform was the issue, the first hunger strike would never have begun either). But because political status and not prison reform was the question at issue, Bobby Sands and his fellow-protestors had to manufacture a fairy story about the British agreeing in substance to concede political status and then renegeing on the agreement.

THE REGIME IN THE MAZE PRISON

Conforming prisoners in the Maze are entitled to wear their own clothes for about three-quarters of the time. During the remaining time, they are required to wear civilian type clothing issued by the authorities. But there is nothing to stop a prisoner from bringing in clothes that are the same as the prison-issue clothes, and since the prison-issue clothes are kept by the prisoner himself it is hard to see how the authorities could ensure that all prisoners wore the approved clothes during working hours. As regard prison work, it can be avoided by taking an educational course. This would be at the discretion of the prison authorities, and there would be no courses in bomb-making, but undoubtedly, if the Provisionals chose to work the system as it is, very few of them would have to do prison work.

Given all this, given the existing position in relation to the entire five demands as Atkins explained it last December, if Sands, Hughes, McCreesh and O'Hara died for the five demands as concrete measures of prison reform then they must have been raving lunatics. If what Mr. Haughey says is true, if there is

a "humanitarian solution" which they would have accepted, if they starved themselves to death only because the administration in the Maze was not "flexible" enough, then they had taken leave of their senses on the very first day they refused food. But there is no good reason to consider them lunatics. Fanatics, yes; lunatics no. They knew very well what their aim was, and so do their successors on hunger strike - a clear, cut-and-dried political victory over the British Government, leading to further successes for the organisations to which they belong, the Provisional IRA and the INLA.

HUMANITARIAN HAUGHEY?

If Mr. Haughey (and Cardinal O'Fiaich and John Hume, who say the same) believed what he says, his **own** sanity would be doubtful. As for his "humanitarian concern", it can be said that humanitariasm, like charity, begins at home. Prison conditions in Northern Ireland are far superior to prison conditions in the Republic, and nobody in the North has been sentenced to serve forty years without remission, although about 600 members of the security forces have been killed there over the past decade. Mr. Haughey's "humanitarianism", since it so obviously does not begin at home, must be considered mere humbug - and since it is so obviously misapplied, must be considered a deceitful political ploy. So what is he trying to achieve by it?

THE FIRST NATIONAL AIM

Mr. Haughey believes that nationalism is good for the Irish. Certainly, it is good for his party. Fianna Fail is founded on it. The one remaining nationalist objective (given that the revival of the Irish language has been given up as a lost cause and quietly buried) is the annexation of Northern Ireland, or "the coming together of all the Irish people", or any other euphemism you like.

This objective is further from achievement now than on the day Fianna Fail was founded. It is made possible by the consistent refusal of a million Protestants in Northern Ireland to accept it. As long as the British Government upholds the wishes of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, so long will the present-day territory of that state remain part of the United Kingdom - and the wishes of the majority will not change in the foreseeable future; the Provisional campaign has seen to that.

But suppose Britain became weary of Northern Ireland, and decided to ditch it? The present British Government has made it a point of fundamental and constantly-acknowledged principle to do no such thing, and it is most unlikely that any future Government will do so.

But if a British Government **did** withdraw its army and administration from Northern Ireland, a united Ireland would not result. There would be a sectarian civil war, and after horrific slaughter in Belfast and the clearing of wide areas around the present border, with Catholics being driven southwards and westwards, and Protestants being driven northwards and eastwards, an independent Protestant state would emerge in Northern Ireland controlling a reduced territory.

SOUTHERN ARMY INVASION?

There are many Northern Catholics who deny that this will happen if the British withdraw. The provisional campaign itself is based on a hope that something else will happen. When the crunch comes, they expect that the **Republic will mobilise on the side of the Catholics and tip the balance in their favour.**

This is the illusion which makes it possible for Catholics in West Belfast to rush in like lemmings behind the H-Block campaign. Whoever encourages them in such an illusion is doing them a very bad service. But what other effect can Mr. Haughey's nationalism, asserted so frequently and in so many varied ways, have on the Belfast Catholics except to encourage them in their illusions? It is all very well for their country cousins in Crossmaglen; when the crunch comes, **they** can be reasonably sure of coming out winners.

DANGEROUS DELUSIONS

The political direction now being taken by Northern Catholics is a highly dangerous one. Southern political parties and particularly Fianna Fail, on whom the Falls Road and the Short Strand have traditionally looked as the national political leadership, must be considered to have a responsibility for their political welfare - namely, to tell them what they can and cannot expect, and to prevent them from behaving like lemmings.

Does anybody in the South seriously believe that if all hell breaks loose in Belfast, that the man-power of the Irish Republic, from Cork to Donegal will be mobilised? And supposing for a moment that it is mobilised, can they believe that it will be capable of sorting out Belfast and the rest of the North? But there **are** people in the Catholic areas of the North who believe as much. It is time to disillusion them. Mr. Haughey is doing the very opposite, and Fine Gael and Labour are not challenging him.

THE PURPOSE OF FIANNA FAIL'S GREEN CARD

H-Block, the "special relationship" with Thatcher, (though nobody has ever explained what is so special about it - the phrase has no meaning apart from conjuring up a hazy image of holding hands) and so forth all serve as convenient distraction from that promise of full employment by 1983, which Fianna Fail made before Haughey had yet become Taoiseach. And in general, the H-Block campaign with its Catholic-devotional and clericalist atmosphere, with the modern anti-partition campaign of which it is a part, tends to reproduce the atmosphere in which Fianna Fail first grew and flourished - the atmosphere of deValera's Ireland.

Increasing numbers of people in the republic, especially of the working class which has suddenly over the past two decades become the numerical majority, want to make a clean break with deValera's Ireland. We want class politics and secular laws. We do not want nationalist mob oratory, populist guff that obscures the economic and social issues, or Catholic-Protestant bigotry in its political or military forms. A sectarian civil war is not our idea of what is needed, either for the people of Northern Ireland or for our own fuller satisfaction.

THE INEVITABLE ROAD OF NATIONALIST-SOCIALISTS

Mrs. Bernadette McAliskey once claimed to be a non-sectarian socialist; her degeneration into a straightforward nationalist bigot is typical of many erstwhile "non-sectarian republicans", and is paralleled by many others who once wanted to get away from the dead-end movements of Irish politics, but were sucked into the latest one. At the funeral of a hunger-striker in Derry, complaining that even more priests were not giving their blessing to the H-Block campaign, she lamented:

"It is tragic that at this time in our history, the Irish people who, for centuries have defended their Church and Religion, should by and large be abandoned by it in their hour of greatest need". (Irish Times, 26/5/1981).

The H-Block campaign is the past trying to intimidate the future. We must not succumb.

Get the

Limerick Socialist

every month

THE CORPORATION

FROM SHAWN-A-SCOUB

PART ELEVEN

by Michael Hogan

FROM A SKETCH OF THE MAMMON OF INIQUITY PART TWO

No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.—Matthew. VI, Chap. 24 ver

Sure, fortune is a glorious thing
In worldly estimation;
Each wealthy ghoul is deemed a king,
And sleek'd with adulation:
But half her favourites are such brutes,
Dull, worthless, sour and sombre;
I'd sooner herd with owls and coots
Than rank among their number.

Oh, cursed omnipotent cash!
What sorcery is about you;
When men are looked upon as trash,
If they are found without you?
Thou leadest the illiterate ass
To pleasure's social centre,
Thou givest the profligate a pass
Where merit dares not enter.

Society, thou monster masked!
Oh, what a dire enormity
Of vice is basking, and has basked,
Within thy glossed deformity?
Thy fashions, privileges and powers,
And honors that enwreath them,
Are like parterres of cultured flowers
With reptiles hid beneath them.

If 'twere God's will that wicked deeds
Were branded on the doers;
What hideous labels would we read
On fashion's fine pursuers:
The pompous butterflies of rank
Would soon leave off parading;
And streets and squares grow bare and blank
Of gilded masquerading.

A heart debased can hide its sin
Beneath a tinsel cover,
Just as piece of muslin thin
Might swathe an ulcer over:
Thus well-trained hypocrites will wear

A surface of politeness;
But 'tis the devil assuming there
An angel's winning brightness.

The wretch that crams his money bags,
And robs the poor, is respected
While simple honesty in rags
Is spurned and rejected.
And religion that never meant
To act or speak ungentle;
Can show ten wolves for every saint
Beneath her holy mantle.

The titled brute of large estate,
And golden thousands swelling;
Beholds with eye of scorn and hate
The peasant's humble dwelling:
To pamperise his kindred beast
The cot to shreds is torn,
And out upon the world's wide waste
The tenant's flung forlorn.

That honest soul who toiled thro' life
In bleak or burning weather,
To keep his children and his wife
In humble love together:
Those innocents who, night or day,
Had ne'er offended heaven,
By a curst human beast of prey
To starve and die are driven.

The icy blast of winter's night
Has frozen fen and farm,
While in his parlour rich and bright,
A landlord's lolling warm.
While shivering in their ruined hut,
His weeping victims gather
Around their helpless, sobbing sire,
And broken-hearted mother.

And christian men have made the law
That sanctions this atrocity:
And arms a human hell-kite's claw
With rapine and audacity.
Those who empower and those that do

Hell's work alike are guilty;
Just as the young pig and the sow
Fraternally are filthy.

The sharks, grim terrors of the deep,
Will not devour each other;
The wolf upon the mountain steep
Will spare his savage brother:
While man, the godlike, heaven-designed,
Out-brutes the brutal savage
In cruelty, and makes kind
The victim of his ravage.

Oh, ye curst plunderers of the poor!
Ye hell-plagues of creation!
How dare you lift your eyes demure,
And boast of civilisation?
How dare you say your civilised
By christian education?
Ye're but politely devilized,
And varnished for damnation.

But were you in a thousand hells
A thousand times convicted,
'Twould not repair the wrongs and ills
And sorrows you've inflicted;
'Twould not restore the household peace
Your baseness wrought to ruin;
Nor even one kindred tie replace
That perished by your doing.

Oh, Mammon, monster! what a curse
You are to human nature?
The evil heart grows daily worse
Where you're the worshipped creature:
You make black-biting wolves of men
Devour their feeble brothers;
And steals their bosoms, and within
All fellow-feeling smothers.

Even in religion's holy ring
Thou hideous beast I spy thee;
While charity with drooping wing,
Expectant waits beside thee;
Thy right hand holds the tight purse string
Thy left devotion's bridle;
While patient charity, poor thing,
Is still kept standing idle.

We're told by theological men
Who doubtless know their lesson;
That charity can cover sin,
And poverty's a blessing;

If charity in hut or hall
Put Poverty's cloak upon her;
She need not cover sin at all,
For all the world would shun her.

As sure as pence compose a pound,
An undisputed fact 'tis,
The preaching has a race-horse bound,
While snail-like crawls the practice:
There's many a cash-grub I presume,
The gospel-harvest reaping;
Who would do better with a broom
The public highways sweeping.

The wretch who for defraud's black sin
Deserves a hangman's halter,
With solemn eyes and cold lips thin,
Prays nearest to the altar;
Perhaps while he pretends to pray,
And praise lord on Sunday,
He's thinking in a zealous way,
Of those he'll fleece on Monday.

Christ again resigned his throne,
And came, in poor robes simple,
To visit earth, he'd scarce be known
Inside his Father's Temple;
He'd find a Judas to betray,
A Peter to deny him,
A Pilate to vote his life away,
And slaves to crucify him.

Oh, religion! when by heretic means
Thou art not persecuted,
For servile ends and sordid gains
Thou'rt basely prostituted;
'Tis not for sacred love of thee
That hundreds wear thy raiment,
But that thou'rt always sure to be
A source of ample payment.

Those sleek bombastic satellites
That counterfeit devotion,
With souls as cold as winter nights,
And cunning deep as ocean;
They rant, and cant, while all for "tin"
The pious work is doing,
But differ with those godly men,
And soon they'll plot your ruin.



HAUGHEY'S HOOK

For 12 years, respectable Republican politicians in Fianna Fail and the SDLP have been condemning the IRA as depraved and blood-thirsty criminals. They are quick to add, however, that this depraved and blood-thirsty crime wave will continue until respectable politicians like themselves are handed a united Ireland. The idea is to catch whatever political apples fall into their laps as a result of the IRA shaking the tree while tut-tutting about how immoral it is to shake apple trees.

There is a fairly tight consensus among southern media men that this behaviour constitutes statesman-like and responsible politics, so no effort is ever made on radio, television, or in the press to embarrass these responsible statesmen by pointing out their hypocrisy.

The Provisionals, however have every reason to resent their exploitation as a bargaining counter by pompous and self-righteous politicians. They have been making the most of their position on centre stage in recent events to ask all kinds of awkward questions - like where does the Southern Government stand on the 5 demands. Haughey could send Sile de Valera careering about demanding political status without committing himself or the government. The obliging opposition parties remained silent and the kindly media never queried Haughey's personal stance. But Thatcher put the ball squarely back in Haughey's court by insisting that all representations on the H-Block issue should come from the Government. Sile was silent after that; as a Haughey puppet she could not turn on her puppet master. But the Provisionals suffer from no such restraints. They have determinedly fixed the unpleasant glare of the spotlight on Haughey; what is his position on the 5 demands?

"FLEXIBILITY"

Having branded the IRA as depraved criminals, the political parties cannot support political status. But being republicans, they cannot support Thatcher's overt unionist stance either. Hence the desperate scramble to carve out an illusory middle position. Someone dug up the report of the European Commission on Human Rights, and the magic word "flexibility" suddenly entered every southern politician's vocabulary. This one word is now the single slender life-line to which the floundering politicians cling. Never mind that the main thrust of the Commission's report was to **reject** political status. Never mind that no one has any idea of precisely how or in relation to which of the 5 demands this "flexibility" should be exercised. Never mind that since the Commission's report, the British Government entered into negotiations with the prisoners and conceded, according to de Valera, 80% of their demands. Is conceding 80% of one's opponents demands not being "flexible"? Or is being flexible only to be understood as one side "compromising" 100%?

The fact is, the prisoners are seeking political victory for the provisionals and therefore are not at all interested in compromise or flexibility. Sands contemptuously rejected the intervention of the European Commission as diversionary, which indeed it was, as the Commission had already rejected political status, and the whole thing was engineered by Haughey to get himself off the hook.

The National H-Block Committee, however, refused to let him off the hook. Daily they called on him to state his position. As tension mounted, they demanded he make a public commitment of support. Then Sands made a dramatic death-bed plea for his support. The only sound from the Taoiseach's office was the sound of squirming.

Haughey's crawl back to power over the last 10 years has been accompanied by a carefully projected image as a virtual political superman. With the economy in a mess, his claims to

financial wizardry are looking threadbare - and all he has left is republicanism - the Mr. Fixit of the Northern Problem. Haughey needed to sell the Anglo-Irish studies as a great advance brought about by his supernatural political prowess. The National H-Blocks Committee, however, have shown up his pretensions rather nicely. Paschal Mooney's drivelling eulogy of Haughey as "the man who melted the heart of the iron lady" now rings somewhat hollow. As on H-Block demonstrator put it: "If you can't get the 5 demands, what can you get?".

Young Tiger?

Northern Ireland tends to attract more than its fair share of political visitors. One such type is the revolutionary tourist from abroad answering the "call of the barricades". These tend to be victims of provo propaganda who, with some success, put abroad the idea of a war of liberation against British imperialism. These blow-ins tend to blow out again just as quickly when they discover, not a war of liberation against British imperialism, but a campaign or coercion against the Protestant community - a historically evolved community of a million people who are simply asserting their right to self determination to live in the state of their choice.

Another type of political tourist are those Southern politicians who from time to time make carefully planned 'spontaneous' visits to selected Catholic areas of the North. Such a visitor was the current president, Hillery, who some years ago appeared in West Belfast to begin his famous crusade against partition and the Falls Road was an appropriate launching pad.

Meddlers in this type are inexcusable. In the name of "doing something for our people up there", their real interest is in doing something for themselves, or their party, down here. While riding on the coat-tails of the IRA, they give the Catholic people a false sense of expectation about what the South could or would do to help.

Political excursions of this type tend to emanate from Fianna Fail, despite the fact of having its very own northern wing in appropriate territorial camouflage, the SDLP. Recently, however, Fine Gael got in on the act with the announcement that the chairman of Young Fine Gael, Jim Finucane, was to spend a week in Northern Ireland to "explore the possibility of establishing Young Fine Gael branches in each of the six counties". The young tiger went on to say that "our party could pioneer a new departure in Irish politics, one which could help to realise the full implications of the ultimate unity of this country".

What are the "full implications" of this particular departure? Far from being a new departure, this scheme is the most hare-brained adaptation of a very old practice i.e. politicians and political parties in the south using the Catholic community in the North as a trojan horse in pursuit of a united Ireland. This is the most cynical form of political adventurism - gaining party-political advantage "on another man's wound".

Jim Finucane has a very unsavoury history in building up his reputation through publicity-seeking posturing with various disadvantaged groups in the South. Now it is the turn of the Northern Catholics to help build Finucane's image, and that of Fine Gael. Finucane will probably stick around long enough to get his photo taken and his name in the paper, just as he did with Dublin's prostitutes and disabled people. And the Northern Catholics can expect as much practical benefit from his attention as the previous object of his ostentatious concern, or as much as they can expect from any southern politician.

Have the Fine Gael "old Guard" had anything to say about the young tigers crossing the border? Fitzgerald can probably use it as a counterweight to Charlie's gimmicks on behalf of "our people up there", and no doubt, they would see this meddling in the North by Young Fine Gaelers as politically preferable to them raising awkward questions about the nature of southern society, as the recent furore concerning abortion has made clear.